The anthropological analysis of rites of passage in Bakhtiari tribe: A case study in women's clothing

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ABSTRACT

The rites of passage are the customs of passage from one social situation to another that can be different based on various tribes and cultures. Different tribes exist in Iran with various customs in their rites of passage. The present study focused on the customs of Bakhtiari people to analyze the girls' clothing in three stages of pre-marriage, during the marriage, and post-marriage in the form of rites of passage theory. The results indicated that Bakhtiari girls find a new identity by changing their clothing style at any stage of life and obtain a new status in their socialization process. The color of dress and style of Bakhtiari girls and women at any stage of life indicate the responsibilities and expectations they feel according to their natural and biological conditions. The clothing style of Bakhtiari girls and meaning of different colors in these dresses show their culture different from other Iranian tribes.

Keywords: Rites of passage, Bakhtiari tribe, clothing, girls, women.

INTRODUCTION

Arnold Van Gennep, the Belgian anthropologist scholar, pioneered to discuss the rites of passage. The rites of passage show the passage of a person from one social situation to another one. Birth, maturity, marriage, being parents, and death all create some situations for such an event. In other words, the rites of passage describe the customs held in life sensitive moments such as birth, maturity, joining a new group, marriage, etc. Initiation customs such as baptism is one of the rites of passage acting as rules and laws in the birthplace. Sometimes, these customs can be highly essential such as fasting, hard tests, physical disabilities, amputation, austerity, etc. which are valuable to the society producing them. Such values are institutionalized during some ceremonies for the person and society. In addition, the rites of passage help the person pass the stages which are called life crises or evolution crises, accompany him throughout all his life, allow him be placed in a new world, and obtain his special social place in front of other men, women, young people, and the elderly. Further, the rites of passage show the transformation of social place and have a strengthening role in group integrity like other collective standards. The rites of passage provide some situations for gathering people and collective action. In fact, such rites strengthen the group solidarity and reinforce the fundamental values and beliefs of society leading to the strengthened collective spirit and meaningful life. The rites of passage play a significant role in giving meaning to daily life. Human dies in himself by passing some tests and observing some temporary or permanent taboos. Then, he leaves his unsacred and material world via a mysterious transmutation and then is born in a spiritual and sacred world. At this stage, he begins his social life among people by gaining some privileges and accepting some responsibilities.

The rites of passage are mainly derived from the formal and apparent rules as well as religious and traditional beliefs of every tribe. Such rules can be manifested in specific forms and instructions such as wearing the clothes with certain color and pattern, singing songs together with accurate and predetermined words, and praying with special terms, as people should follow special rules while running specific ceremonies like baptism, fasting, holding a historical event, etc. The intention and thoughts of the person significantly affects the rites of passage according to
the cultures and tribes. Thus, the person should coordinate his behaviors to internal intentions at the rites of passage to establish the relationships to the invisible world and meet his personal demands. In this study, the rites of passage in Bakhtiari tribe were studied. Since all aspects of the rites of passage cannot be analyzed in one study, only the clothing of Bakhtiari girls in the rites of passage was investigated. For this purpose, the Bakhtiari tribe was first introduced. Then, the rites of passage were explained and finally the role of Bakhtiari girls and women’s clothing in passage from one social situation to another one was analyzed in three groups. No considerable study was conducted in relation to the clothing of Bakhtiari girls.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**Bakhtiari tribe**

**Bakhtiari land**

The region called Bakhtiari has never had constant borders since the Safavid era and sometimes its area was limited. The current region of Bakhtiari in Iran is excessively limited in terms of area than before. In terms of geographical coordinates, this land is located between 31° and 16 min north of Ramhormoz and 33° and 22 min north of Aliqudarz in the east Lorestan Province. In terms of geographical longitude, it is located between 48° and 50 min north of Shushtar and 58° and 27 min east of Borujen, one of the cities in Chahar Mahal Bakhtiari Province (Aman, 1993:29). This region is limited to Isfahan and Lorestan Provinces from the north, to Isfahan from the east, to Khuzestan from the west, and to Kohgiluye and Boyer Ahmad from the south (Ghorbanipour, 2010:37). Bakhtiari land is located in an area between Khuzestan and Isfahan while Zagros Mountain passes the Bakhtiari territory from the northwest to the southeast. Such a geographical status divides this region into two different parts. The mountainous part is located in the east and the plain part in the west while the mountainous part is the summer quarter and the plain part is the winter quarter (Mirzai, 1994:97).

The territory of Bakhtiari is divided into three parts. First, in the margins of Khuzestan where Bakhtiari people do agriculture in their lands and is on Bakhtiari winter quarter. Second, the summer quarter Mountains which are along the northwest to the southeast. In these mountains, there is Bakhtiari summer quarter. Third, the middle plateau which is a wide area is the only pasture where some Bakhtiari non-immigrant tribes live in the surrounding villages. People call these three areas as Miankuh, Poshtekuh, and Pishkuh (Garethowit, 1996: 5-6). Bakhtiari land has an area of near 46200 sq. Km in 1910 and is divided according to the compulsory settlement of nomads’ policy, concentration policy, and Bakhtiari khans’ dispossession/ some parts of this land was dedicated to Isfahan Province, some parts to Lorestan Province, some parts to Khuzestan Province, and some parts took the name of Chahar Mahale Bakhtiari government after some administrative divisions. However, only one part of Chahar Mahale Bakhtiari is the settlement place of the current Bakhtiari tribe (Aman, 1993:29). Bakhtiari land has a complicated structure according to geologists and geographers. Such a feature is due to impassable heights, chain-like mountains, large rivers, and fertile plains. The most significant mountains are Zardkuh, Oshtorankuh, Haft Tanan, Asmari, Mongasht, Sabzkuh, etc. The Karun and Zayanderuh which are among the most significant rivers of Iran are originated from these heights (Khosravi, 1996: 5-6).

**The origin and race of Bakhtiari tribe**

Many myths and narrations have been expressed on the origin and race of Bakhtiari tribe like other tribes. Generally, there are two theories in the conducted studios. Some people believed that Bakhtiari people are from Aryans (Ahanjide, 1995:10) and referred to some evidence to prove their opinion. Some others considered Bakhtiari people as the immigrant tribes entered the Bakhtiari land from the west of Iran (Syria) since the fifth century onward (Garethwitt, 1996:83). Furthermore, Bakhtiari people were considered as Greek race. Some others believed that Bakhtiari people are known as Bakhtiari because they entered the Plateau of Iran with Alexander the Great and were told after the death of Alexander the Great that “You did not win and it was your chance” (Asad, 1997: 154-335). Bakhtiari is a branch of Lor tribe living in one of the most ancient parts of Iran. The cultural survivors of pre-historic societies in this region indicated the 5000-year civilization on some tribes such as the Elamite living in this area (Aman, 1995: 24-25). The historical evidence showed that the Parthians were settled in Parsumash near the sub-mountains of Zagros Mountains in the east of Shushtar (the current Masjed Soleiman) on two sides of the Karun around 700 AD. However, the information on the situation of Bakhtiari land before the Islam was little and the word “Lor” was used for the first time in the texts of historians and geographers in the 4th century and after hat mostly mentioned as Al-Lorye, Lariye, and Belad Al-lor (Garanjpourpishin, 41).

**The clothing of Bakhtiari tribe**

In the contemporary era, the clothing of Bakhtiari women includes Lachak, Underlachak, Mayna, Bande Suzan, napkin, dress (Jove), Gheri pants, and shoes. Since the main subject of this study was the analysis of rites of passage in Bakhtiari tribe based on the clothing of women and girls, a brief report of such clothes, material, color, symbol, and signs carved on them was presented.
**Lachak:** It is a hat-shaped piece that its back side is located below Mayna (long scarf made of thin silk cloth) and is attached to Mayna through a needle. The upper part of Lachak is beaded including two strings passing the ears and is tied below the neck to keep Lachak fixed on the head. Lachak is designed by small glitters and tiny beads called “Monjoogh” giving it a specific appearance. The Lachak of Bakhtiari women has different types and its most type is called “Riali” designed by old cons (Riali). In some dialects such as Meyvandi, Lachak is called Kolcheh.

**Underlachak or Bonnai:** Gold or silver coins are welded to each other and two strings are tied below the neck called Underlachak or Bonnai (Madadi, 1996: 191).

**Mayna:** It is a long thin silk scarf in blue, green, yellow, red, or purple. The young women use the light colors while the old women use the dark ones.

**Bandesoozan:** It is hung along the back of the head to the waist. Two ends of this string which is full of beads and other accessories are tied to Lachak by two safety pins.

**Napkin:** It is a square-shaped, big, black, and silk napkin which can be considered as a type of headband because women tied on their forehands and then tied to two ends behind the head. A special type of napkin that women wear for funerals is called “Shareh” in the dialect of Bakhtiari people living around Masjed Soleiman.

**Dress (Jove):** It is a wrist long-sleeve dress with three buttons on its slit and pre-chest part. The upper part and skirt of this dress is straight without any wrinkle with a size under the knees while there are a 20-cm slit on both sides of the skirt. The selection of dress color depends on the age of women and girls.

**Gheri pants:** It is a skirt with many layers and wrinkles covering the lower part of the body. In the past, velvet cloth was used which was very attractive but heavy and expensive, while today, a lighter and cheaper cloth is used. Because the pants are heavy, a thin string is used instead of waistband that is called “Dome Shalvar”. Women wear underpants below the Gheri pants called “Pakash”.

**Shoes:** In the past, women wore Giva but today, they are not common among the Bakhtiari women. Nowadays, they wear leather shoes often in black called “Orssi” in Bakhtiari dialect. In the past, the cheap plastic shoes called “Galish” were used (Madadi, 1996: 191-192).

Rites of passage

The rites of passage refer to a set of symbolic actions, rites, and customs common in societies especially the traditional custom-oriented societies which are associated with the passage of human from a level of physical, cultural, and social life and situation to another level. Some other terms such as initiation (Biru, 1988: 186), secret-learning (Rivier, 2011: 205), secret-awareness, custom-passage (Panov and Pern, 1988: 200), initiation, familiarity, and method – learning (Elyade, 1997: 116) were used for this term. Societies use the specific customs based on their cultural system. In addition, many similarities in some customs such as birth, cutting the cord, baby shower, and naming the baby or some other ritualistic behaviors are observed in maturity rites in many societies. Sometimes, the traditions such as Kam bardashtan, fending around the baby and mother, Chellebari in Iran, or circumcision in Islamic societies are allocated to specific cultures and societies in the world (Blokbashi, 1988: 65-71). There are some rites such as Nafboran, baby shower as a symbol of separating the baby from the initial environment and mother, and joining to the world of living, fencing and keeping the baby out of the impure environment and evil spirits, as well as Chellebari for baby as the stage of separation and passage, and naming and circumcision, which is the first level of passage for the baby to the religious society. At these stages, babies find personal identities and join to the adult world.

The stages of rites of passage

According to Arnold Van Gennep, who clearly explained the concept of the rites of passage in 1909 for the first time, the passage from one group to another group and from one social status to another one are effective in the reality of the existence so that the life of a man is composed of birth, social maturity, marriage, fatherhood, progress to a higher class, professional expertise, and death. There are some rites for each stage enabling the person to pass from one defined situation to another one (Van Gennep, 1960:3). The rites of passage include a three-layer structure on which base the clothing of Bakhtiari girls is analyzed in this study. According to Van Gennep, the three layers are:

**Separation stage:** In this stage, the person is separated from the group or his last status. At this stage, the person leaves the details of culture in the society for reproducing and continuing the lifestyle. Separation from the past is the most significant part of rites of passage at any stage of evolution (Van Gennep, 1977: 189-191).

**Liminal stage:** After separating from the previous status, the person passes his previous base during some difficult and unbearable rites by relying on the supernatural forces and a kind of ambiguity which is related to mental and emotional complexities but did not enter the new stage (Van Gennep, 1977: 189-191).
The functions of the rites of passage

The rites of passage in societies, especially the old and traditional societies, have an effective role in social and mental behaviors of people as follows:

Evolution and transformation in identity:

Such traditions work as a mental test in transforming the social status and identity-making of individuals in social groups and society (Blokbashi, 1988: 61). Mircha Eliade in the book, “Sacred and non-sacred” interpreted the mysterious rites of passage as “human must die in his existence to be a complete person and be reborn in an excellent world that is the religious and cultural life”. He defined the rites of passage to “The transmutation of human in a supernatural experience of death and resurrection or rebirth” (Eliade, 1959: 187). The rites of passage are not only celebrating the transformations in the life of a person but a series of social relationships and roles are generally recognized for teenagers and young people during these ceremonies (Betis and Plug, 2013: 680-681), through which the person achieves a kind of new identity.

Strengthening the group solidarity:

Rites are the best motivation for holding human communities. The rites which aim at strengthening the spiritual sense are a general area for creating unity and sympathy. Rites typically require a special place to be held causing the unity of humans and creating a sense of sympathy and intimacy due to their form and content. The rites of passage provide a situation for gathering the people and cause a collective action resulting in the strengthened collective spirit and giving meaning to life (Sotoudeh and Ranjbar, 2001: 123). Accordingly, Eliade considered the rites of passage as the actions through which human achieves from a natural existence to a cultural existence and finds a human dignity by receiving the cultural-religious values (Eliade, 1987: 16).

Strengthening the beliefs and social-cultural values

Another function of this rite is that it can strengthen the beliefs and fundamental values of society. The function of such a ceremony was as significant as the educational institutions in the past. The rites of passage are the old traditions which were created for giving meaning to daily life since they protect the social-cultural values and traditions.

The stages of passage for Bakhtiari girls’ clothing

The rites of passage in Bakhtiari tribe can be analyzed in three stages of separation, liminal, and aggregation that the coverage type and different colors at any stage give a new identity to Bakhtiari girls.

Clothing at the separation stage

Color of clothing

The coverage and color selection is a symbol of tribal structures which is a kind of social confirmation and a symbol of status and place. Coverage is formed based on climatic, social, ideological, common, and traditional conditions. The track of traditions is completely clear in the clothing of Bakhtiari tribe. The clothing of Bakhtiari women is a weird world of stunning colors creating an appropriate harmony by combining the colors. Red attracts the attention and yellow is relaxing. The clothing of girls is like their mothers but in a smaller size. Girls use contrasting colors such as yellow, red, and blue in their clothes. Green dress and red pants or orange dress and blue pants are one of the characteristics of their clothing. Girls usually harmonize the natural cold and warmth to their taste and wear red and orange in the cold season but green and blue in the warm season (Davoudi, 2014:370-378). Consequently, the passage from one season to another season or the changes in humans’ tastes changes their clothing type and selected color (Figure 1).

Types of love

Marriage is passage from a social, religious, and cultural group to another group. Thus, the love of girls changes with their marriage transferring them from the single group to married group. Thus, this type of ceremony is encountered with a kind of rites of passage (Eliadh, 2011: 171-175).
Brues (1948) stated that the rites of passage change people and replace the old roles, situations, and identities to new roles, situations, and identities (Lincoln, 1991: 6). According to Lincoln, most girls learned how to cook, take care of children, and alike from their mothers and other women (Boy, 2013: 217-218). Girls are turned into women by passing from girlish clothing (Ibid, 219). Jove of Bakhtiari girls is a colorful dress with different flowers and round, peacock, and square collars having faggoting and brocade on the bottom or sometimes designed by glitter, gold, Rial, and coin. The sleeve of these dresses is long with stretch wrist or has buttons with straight wrist (Davoudi, 2014: 375). Using diverse and light colors in the dress of Bakhtiari women is of great importance. Red is the only fixed color in their dress that never changes. Red color in the dress of Bakhtiari girls is derived from the red color of flowers in Zagros Mountains. The scarf of young girls is colorful or white designed by small glitters making sound while walking. Bakhtiari women fill their forehead and Lachak by gold and silver coins. Lachak is so common among all Bakhtiari women but girls wear it less and often use scarf (Davoudi, 2014: 376-378). The type of Bakhtiari girls’ dress at the time of marriage which is associated with entering a new social situation is based on their new role. The clothing of girls is beautiful and colorful at the time of marriage each color giving a new role to the girls in society.

Brues (1948) stated that the rites of passage change people and replace the old roles, situations, and identities to new roles, situations, and identities (Lincoln, 1991: 6). Thus, the type of clothing for girls at the time of their marriage which is associated with entering a new social situation is based on their new role. The clothing of girls is beautiful and colorful at the time of marriage each color giving a new role to the girls in society.

Clothing at the passage stage

The rites of passage determine a role for the people in society in addition to the recreation of a tradition, ritual, and culture. The rites of passage create new social roles and relationships for teenagers and young people (Betis and Plug, 2013: 680-681). Thus, the type of clothing for girls at the time of their marriage which is associated with entering a new social situation is based on their new role. The clothing of girls is beautiful and colorful at the time of marriage each color giving a new role to the girls in society.

Ring

Ring is one of the coverage of Bakhtiari girls while marrying. Ring is usually made of Agate and Brass. However, the rich people wear gold and silver rings with Turquoise, Agate, and gold Ashrafi in their weddings. The verse (انگشتر مُهرِه عقیق کِردُم وِه دستِت نَکُنِه وِه کَس گُشی تِی کالِ مَستِت) means that I gave you a ring with Agate, never open your beautiful eyes to somebody else (Davoudi, 2014: 380-381). This verse means the new social status of girl making her committed to a new social status and new identity after the marriage. In fact, ring means the commitment to someone. By wearing the ring, the girl considers her husband as her support, mate, and friend forever.

Fastening the belt

There is an old tradition called Kadbastan (fastening the bride’s belt). At that time, a belt was fastened around the bride’s waist by her father, brother, or uncle. While taking the bride, a piece of sugar, rock candy, or bread is tied up to her waist. Bread is the symbol of blessing and happiness, sugar is the symbol of fortunate, and green is the symbol of fertility (Davoudi, 2014: 251-252). The belt fastened to the bride’s waist while she leaves her father’s house is made of Chalvar and a symbol of shroud which means that only death can separate her from the groom. Sugar or rock candy is the wish of a sweet life for the bride and groom. Bread is blessing and the groom eats it when the bride comes to his house to show his respect to his wife (Davoudi, 2014: 251-252). This symbol among the Bakhtiari people is highly effective and significant so that it can lower down the statistics of divorce and create a kind of commitment and loyalty. Due to the effect of such rites, the wife will be always with her husband to deal with all their difficulties. Figure 3 shows an example of the Bakhtiari bridal belt.
Hanabandan is another traditional and beautiful tradition while marrying. It is a cultural and social phenomenon with special clothing which has been always significant since the past and is full of signs and symbols (Rafi and Kamaloo, 2014: 28-29). Hana is considered as one of the very sacred herbs among the Iranians. Hanabandan shows the exit from one group and entry to another group accepting a new role in the new society. The color coming from the sacred hana tree is a symbol of spiritual life when it is taken from the bride’s hand and given to her husband. On the other hand, it converts the bond between the bride and groom into a sacred issue that much effort must be made for its protection. Figure 4 shows a Hanabandan ceremony during the wedding among the Bakhtiari people.

**Women’s clothing at the aggregation stage**

One of the signs and behaviors showing the separation stage or the so called “Dar Hesarraftan” stage when the woman enter the aggregation stage is wearing a kind of special dress distinguishing her from others (Eliade, 1959: 11-13). Bakhtiari women reach their life-evolution stage when they marry and achieve a transmutation in a new life experience. At this period, women leave their childhood and adolescence behind and think of a new life and world. Bakhtiari women dedicate themselves completely to life at the aggregation stage and they always make their best efforts for achieving a progress in life since they find a new character. At this period, women’s clothing indicates their different identity than their last two stages.

**Head coverage**

At this stage, women use a scarf called Lachak, Mayna, and Pishani band. Lachak has various type such as beaded Lachak, Almas-nama (Diamond) Lachak, and Riali Lachak. The traditional Lachak used by most Bakhtiari women below Mayna is made of two rectangular colorful velvet clothes. The front part of Lachak is velvet and the smaller piece is a semicircular with different color, sewn by thinner fabrics to the lid. Lachak is typically designed by bead, diamond, Rial, gold coin, Ashrafi, or silver Rials. Lachak is tied by two strings below the chin while two long hair pieces are put on both sides of the face and then left below Lachak (Davoudi, 2014: 373-374). Bakhtiari women braid a part of their hair in different strands, leave them behind their head, and then wave another part of their hair and put around their face (Layard, 1988: 134-135). Lachak called “Sarband” is a beautiful hijab fill of designs which is attractive for human due to its diverse and cheerful colors and plays a prominent role in a new look at the ancient aesthetics of hijab among the Bakhtiari people. The designs on Lachak are a symbol of simplicity and aesthetics full of Bakhtiari originality. Lachak is different according to the situation since it has different models for weddings, funerals, workplace, and the like. The situation of women is different in wearing Lachak, so that they wear colorful Lachak and long-tail Lachak in happy ceremonies but short and darker Lachak in funerals.

Mayna is another kind of scarf made of colorful silk and has a rectangular shape in a 1-1.5 m width and 5-4 m length covering the shoulder, elbow, chest, and waist. Bakhtiari women pin simple designs after folding the Lachak into 2-3 layers, put the rest of Lachak behind their shoulders, wave their front hair, leave the hair below the Lachak, and hid it.
Dress

The Bakhtiari women who entered the aggregation stage use a dress called Jove with different colors on Gheri pants. Jove usually has a simple design, straight sleeves, and round or open collar that comes along the knee to the ankle (Figure 6). The pants of Bakhtiari women are a skirt full of layers with a 1-m width and 6-12 m length. As the width is more, its layers will be more and appropriate for sitting and standing up. The pants are sewn as layered and a cotton strand goes through the top layer. Then, it is tied tightly to bear its heavy size. This kind of pants is called Gheri pants (Davoudi, 2014: 375-376). This kind of clothing not only shows Hijab as the symbol of dignity but also shows the difference of this class of women from other classes in society. At this period, they are completely distinguished from each other due to the different coverage from the separation stage. The behavior and coverage of women at this stage is in such a way that they aim both for complete coverage of their body and social acceptance because at this stage the social status and acceptance in society are among the significant objectives of Bakhtiari women.

CONCLUSION

The coverage of Bakhtiari women and using special colors at any stage of life depict the rites of passage among the Bakhtiari tribe of Iran. Based on the rites of passage theory, the type of coverage and behaviors of Bakhtiari women at three stages of separation, liminal, and aggregation indicates the different social identity of women at any stage. At the separation stage, girls use coverage with contrasting colors such as yellow, red, and blue. Green dress and red pants or orange dress and blue pants are one of the characteristics of their dress. At this stage, Bakhtiari girls have freedom, so they match the cold and warmth of nature to their interest. The lower part of their dress is mainly faggoted and brocaded or designed by glitter, gold, Rial, or coin. Using diverse and happy colors is derived from the flowers of Zagros Mountains and is the only fixed color in their dress which never changes. The scarf of girls at this stage is white designed by tiny glitters making a little but meaningful sound while walking. At the liminal stage which is inter woven with marriage the type of coverage of Bakhtiari girls becomes different depicting the different identity of Bakhtiari women.

At this stage, Bakhtiari girls wear a ring made of Agate, brass, or gold according to their financial state indicating the new social status of girls. When the bride leaves her father’s house, a belt made of Chalvar that is a symbol of shroud is tied around her waist by her brother or father. Then, it will be opened by the groom when the bride enters his house to show a symbol of death as the only thing separating them. Sugar, rock candy, or a piece of bread are put among the layers of this belt and is considered as the

Figure 5: Head coverage among the Bakhtiari women.

Figure 6: Bakhtiari women’s dress.
only thing that the groom eats after the rites of passage to show his commitment to the bride until the end of their lives. These rites create a kind of commitment between the Bakhtiari couples leading to a significant reduction in divorce statistics of this tribe than that of other Iranian tribes. At the aggregation stage, the women’s clothing indicates a different identity for Bakhtiari women. At this stage, women use a scarf called Lachak, Mayna, and Pishani band with simple colors. At this stage, Bakhtiari women braid a part of their hair in different strands, leave them behind their head, and then wave another part of their hair and put around their face. Bakhtiari women use a coverage called Pishani band. They wear a dress called Jove with different colors on Gherti pants. Jove normally has a simple design, straight sleeves, and round or open collar which comes along the knee to the ankle. The pants of Bakhtiari women are a layered skirt with 1 m width and 6-12 m length. As the width is more, its layers will be more appropriate for sitting and standing up. This type of clothing at the aggregation stage shows the passage of women from their previous identity, which helps them prepare themselves for fulfilling the responsibilities of their marital life imposed to them after marriage.

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